



Non-verbal communication

Great communicators know that communication is so much more than just words. Strong communication is the combination of three factors; body language, content and voice (how you say it). Most people understand that all three elements are important in a great presentation but just how important are body language and the voice?

Not long ago there was a study produced on non-congruent communication. This study specifically looked at what happens when the voice, the words and the body do not line up with each other (ex. You are saying "I am happy" while frowning). The study found that body language made up 55% of communication, the voice made up 38% and content made up only 7%. The results of this study tell us as presenters just how important non-verbal communication is.

Below we will explore a few ways to improve both body language as well as voice.

Open Body language

When improving our body language, the first thing we must do is analyse whether we are giving off open or closed body language. Open body language is as the name suggests, a group of movements and gestures that generally leave the body open or exposed. Closed body language is a grouping of movement that close off or hide certain body parts (chest, hands, etc). Some examples of closed body language are when your arms or legs are crossed, hands in the pockets or clasped in front and avoiding eye contact. Closed body language can send signals to your listener that you have something to hide, you are untrusting, or you are dishonest. If we want to send positive signals of honesty, confidence and credibility to our audience then utilizing open body language will help us to accomplish this.

Open body language fundamentals

1) Feet

- a. The feet are shoulder width apart, slightly pointed outwards. Feet remain planted unless movement is utilized to emphasize a point.

2) Arms

- a. Arms are hanging loosely at the sides and remain there unless utilized to emphasize points.

3) Shoulders

- a. Relaxed and slightly pulled back leaving the chest exposed.

4) Face

- a. Relaxed smile.

5) Eye

- a. Make sure you are looking at your audience giving them eye contact.





Tips for great body language

1) Eye contact

- a. Eye contact will create moments of one on one communication with your audience. When you look at someone and speak during your presentation it should feel as if it is just two individuals chatting over coffee. This will really aid in engaging your audience, pulling them into your speech and creating a lasting impact. The best rule of thumb for eye contact is to maintain it with one individual for a single idea or sentence then move on to the next person.

2) Congruent body language

- a. Body language should mirror the words that you are using. What this means is that your body and words communicate the exact same thing. If you were saying that something is increasing drastically you would want to motion your hand to the sky to show that it is going up. If you were talking about being happy and excited, you would want to show that with a smile or a grin. The key concept is to have your body echo your words.

3) Lateral movement

- a. When do you move from side to side? This is best to do when you are transitioning between ideas/ points or places in time. One way to do this could be by expressing point one of your speech on the left of the speaking area, point 2 in the middle and point 3 on the right of the speaking area. The transition will help the audience to understand that you are moving between different ideas.

4) Front and back movement

- a. Movement to the front is best when you want to emphasize a main point, something that is positive or that you want your audience to remember. Backwards movement is best when describing something that is negative or that you don't agree with.

5) Mirroring

- a. Mirroring is a great technique for networking events or meetings. Mirroring with body language is a great way to build an instant connection with people you communicate with. Mirroring is when you assume the same body language as the person you are talking with. If they have their hands crossed, then you cross your hands too, if they have one leg sticking out then you mimic that same stance. This mirror effect will create likeness and make them feel at ease. Mirroring is something that is very easy to implement but can help to put those who you communicate with at ease.





How to build great body language

- **Practice on your own**
 - The best two ways to do this is either with a mirror or a video camera. By practicing with a mirror or video camera you can see how your body moves and reacts to different words within a speech. When you do this, look to see if your movements are congruent with the words that you choose.
- **Find a friend**
 - Practicing in front of people is extremely important in helping you gain powerful reference experience. If you have coworkers or friends that will listen to you, utilize them as resource to help you hone your skills and make sure the material and body language is second nature.
- **Take a class**
 - There are many classes that exist to help individuals hone their body language skills. Some of the best are Toastmasters, Improv and acting. All three of these really focus on utilize body language and building essential communication skills.

Voice

The voice is one of the most powerful tools to convey a specific message. As noted above, voice made up 38% of communication, this means that we need to understand how to effectively utilize it. If you have ever listened to someone who is a monotone speaker you will quickly understand just how detrimental this can be to an audience's engagement and understanding of a message. Below we will explore the basics to effectively utilizing your voice.

Tips for an effective voice

1. **Increasing pitch**
 - a. Increasing pitch means you are getting higher with your voice. This is a great way to effectively show excitement, humor and passion.
2. **Decreasing Pitch**
 - a. Getting lower with your voice. This is best used when you want to create emotion or thoughtfulness. If you have a key idea or key message, lowering your pitch will help you create more depth with it.
3. **Increasing pace**
 - a. Speeding up your talking speed is a good way to create urgency, excitement, humor and passion. You may want to pair this with an increase in pitch for an even greater impact
4. **Decrease pace**
 - a. Slowing down your speaking speed. This is important for something that you want your audience to hear and absorb. If it is the key message, key idea or something that triggers them emotionally then decreasing pace will help it to be heard. You may want to pair this with a decrease in pitch to evoke strong emotions and thoughtfulness.

